To Charles Grey Esq
from the Author

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

CORN BILL.

BY

LORD SHEFFIELD.

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

CORN BILL,

NOW

DEPENDING IN PARLIAMENT.

BY

JOHN LORD SHEFFIELD.

LONDON:

Printed for J. DEBRETT, oppoſite Burlington Houſe, Piccadilly.

M.DCC.XCI.

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

CORN BILL.

DURING the late receſs I thought it my duty to pay a particular attention to the Corn Bill, which it was ſaid muſt paſs this ſeſſion into a law. The more I conſidered it, the greater appeared to me the neceſſity of a full examination, not only of the bill itſelf, but of various other documents neceſſary to a due underſtanding of the ſubject propoſed to be regulated by that bill.

Although not altogether unacquainted with the magnitude of that ſubject, yet, as I proceeded, it appeared to me ſtill more

difficult and extenſive; and the alarming ſituation into which I could not help conceiving that we are gradually running, moſt forcibly impreſſed itſelf on my mind. From various information lately obtained, and from converſation with many different perſons, I have found that the ſubject is not underſtood as it deſerves to be; and having expreſſed that opinion, and ſpoken to ſome friends of the difficulties that had occurred, it has been ſuggeſted to me, that the immediate publication of the notes I had taken, preparatory to a diſcuſſion in Parliament, might poſſibly be uſeful, by promoting a fuller inveſtigation of this intereſting enquiry, particularly as they contained matter not ſo fit for a ſpeech in Parliament, as for deliberate and attentive conſideration. I was fully aware that, to do the ſubject ample juſtice demanded far better abilities than I could pretend to, eſpecially the ability and habit of public ſpeaking, and that the ſubject would even be difficult to a man poſ-

ſeſſing thoſe advantages; moreover, that it required a minute attention and conſideration in the hearers, ſuch as are not to be eaſily obtained in a parliamentary debate—I have therefore conſented to ſubmit to the publick at large my thoughts, intended to have been delivered in Parliament, conſiſting of the interleaved notes which I had made to the bill, almoſt verbatim; wiſhing to give an opportunity of refuting the arguments and opinions I may ſtate, if they are unfounded, or of improving on them, if they ſhould merit notice by thoſe who are far more able than I really feel myſelf to do juſtice to the ſubject.

The Corn Bill now depending in Parliament, however it may in parts ſeem to encourage agriculture, is nevertheleſs highly unfavourable to it. It appears to be dictated by a policy which, neglecting other conſiderations, does not extend beyond providing for the immediate neceſſity of the

conſumer. The framers of that bill ſurely ſhould have foreſeen that the conſequence of the ſyſtem they mean to eſtabliſh muſt be, that the conſumer, now ſo much conſidered, will in the end become liable to extreme uncertainty as to a ſupply of corn, and in great meaſure dependant on foreign countries for ſubſiſtence.

The great object of the bill is evidently to keep down the price of corn *at all events*. Whether that is wiſe and juſt, whether it will not produce ſcarcity hereafter, whether other important conſiderations ſhould not be taken into the account, is certainly well worthy of ſerious enquiry.

For the purpoſe of better examining this matter, it may be proper to make a few previous obſervations on the repreſentation of the Committee of the Privy Council, which is avowedly the ground work of the bill. It contains the principles on which the bill proceeds,

proceeds, and aſſigns reaſons for adopting thoſe princibles.

I ſhall firſt notice a circumſtance of the utmoſt importance, mentioned in that repreſentation of Council, and which muſt ſtrike very forcibly the commoneſt reader. It is there ſtated, that on an average of nineteen years, ending in 1765, the corn exported from this country produced a clear profit of not leſs than 651,000l.; but that on an average of eighteen years, ending in 1788, we have paid to foreigners for a ſupply of corn no leſs than 291,000l. yearly *. It is intimated in the ſame paper, that England muſt not in future think of ſupplying herſelf with corn; and further, that Europe is unable to ſupply itſelf when the crop fails in any degree; that therefore, in ſuch a caſe, we muſt all look for a ſupply

* The ſum paid to foreigners for corn during that period is undoubtedly much greater.

to America. If this be true, it is the moſt alarming information that we of this country have ever heard; ſo alarming, that I cannot conceive the loſs of all we have in Aſia and America would be half ſo fatal, or ſo much to be apprehended; but I truſt, that a dependance on other countries for ſubſiſtence will not of neceſſity be our ſituation. A perſeverance in a bad ſyſtem of corn laws, diſcouraging to agriculture, may in time bring about ſo lamentable a dependance; and ſuch bad ſyſtem will, I fear, be fatally eſtabliſhed, if the Corn Bill ſhould paſs into a law in its preſent form.

If it be true that we are actually in a regular ſtate of dependance on other countries for our ſubſiſtence, the bill ought, as it ſeems to me, to have been formed on totally different principles. Inſtead of a ſhort-ſighted and narrow attention to keep down the price of corn, merely by facilitating its importation, the object of the bill, as I conceive, ſhould

ſhould rather have been to diſcourage a dangerous, waſteful, and uncertain dependance, by ſo effectual an encouragement of tillage, as ſhould not only ſecure to us, at all times, a ſupply for ourſelves in this iſland, but alſo for our dependencies.

The Committee of Council imputes the alarming change from an enriching export to a ruinous import of corn, to an increaſed population, an increaſed opulence, and conſequently an increaſed conſumption; and then adds, that there can be no reaſon to ſuppoſe, either that the agriculture of the country has of late declined, or that for ſo long a continuance of years the ſeaſons can have been uniformly unfavourable. It muſt be obvious to every man, that it is of the utmoſt conſequence to enquire into the cauſe of this change, in order to enable us to provide an adequate remedy for the miſchief.

I know,

I know, from perſonal experience during the whole period alluded to, that the ſuppoſed greater ſcarcity of corn than formerly has not ariſen from continued bad ſeaſons; and it ſeems to me, that there can be little doubt but that the change in queſtion has been occaſioned more by an increaſe of luxury, than by an increaſe of population; and is owing exceedingly to the inattention of the Legiſlature ſo to provide, that the increaſe of tillage might keep pace with the increaſe of conſumption. Whether tillage has increaſed within the period of eighteen years, or even a longer time, is very doubtful. In ſome counties, particularly the Eaſtern, and a few of the ſouthern, and alſo in the poor ſoils that are within reach of manures at a moderate expence, tillage may have increaſed*; but in the midland parts of England,

* The principal proof that is urged of an increaſed growth of corn is drawn from the increaſe of the quantity

England, in the rich ſoils, much land, which was formerly under corn, is now within thirty years become excellent paſture. The increaſed expences that fall on tillage, the multitude of exciſes that in various ſhapes at laſt affect the land, the increaſe of tythe, or of the cuſtom of taking in kind, that miſchievous check to improvement, naturally turn many from tillage to graſsland, by which they avoid a variety of expences, as well as the diſcouragement

quantity brought to market; but that may be accounted for by the change which has taken place in the country as to ſending to the mill the corn which is uſed in families. Very few now ſend wheat to be ground, therefore more appears at the market. The millers now, almoſt univerſally mealmen, by mixing the qualities of wheat, contrive to ſell flour cheaper than the farmer finds it coſts him, if he ſends his own wheat to be ground. At the ſame time he is relieved from apprehenſion as to an unfair decreaſe in meaſure, or a change of his corn; and is not liable to be told, that the fault of the flour ariſes from the badneſs of his own corn.

ariſing from an uncertain price for corn, together with the miſchiefs of a bad ſyſtem of corn laws. Even if there were no other reaſon, the price of meat, butter, cheeſe, and hay, being allowed to find its proper and natural level at market, and the price of corn being depreſſed by importation below its natural and proportionate value, this alone is ſufficient to divert many from tillage to paſture; and as the prices of the former articles increaſe, the practice will continue of exchanging arable land for paſture. Theſe circumſtances of themſelves will ſufficiently account for the decreaſe, or, at leaſt, for the inadequate advance made in tillage for ſome years paſt in this iſland, compared with the increaſed conſumption of corn. The prodigious increaſe in the demands for other kinds of corn, beſides wheat in this kingdom, eſpecially of oats, explains our not having exported ſo much corn of late years as heretofore; and ſhews how the extraordinary importation of oats

in

in particular is found to have happened. Large tracts of lands, which might otherwiſe have produced corn, are now required to provide hay and graſs for the multitude of horſes kept. Add to this, the luxury of the country is ſo much greater than it was, that the demand for butter and cheeſe exceeds, beyond all proportion, that of the former part of this century, which conſequently contributes to divert the farmer from tillage; and although the private brewery is in great meaſure ſuppreſſed among the lower ranks of the people, the public breweries, perhaps, uſe double the quantity of barley they did. The demand of corn for diſtilleries was ſome years ſince comparatively a trifle; and half a century ago a great proportion of the lower claſſes of people, who now eat wheaten, were content with barley, rye, and oaten bread.

If theſe circumſtances are thought to account for the change pointed out by the

Committee of Council, it may be proper to enquire,

Firſt, Whether this kingdom is of neceſſity dependant on other countries for its ſubſiſtance, or whether England can raiſe a ſufficiency of corn to ſupply its own increaſed and increaſing demand.

Second, Whether proper means have been uſed by the Legiſlature to promote a growth of corn equal to the conſumption.

Thirdly, Whether the preſent Corn Bill provides, or what will be, the beſt means of rendering the growth of corn in Great Britain equal to the conſumption.

As to the firſt head of enquiry, I cannot conceive any thing more alarming than the idea of the dependance of a kingdom like this on other countries for ſubſiſtance.—

There

There is no exertion that ſhould not be uſed to avoid it; and I am ſatisfied it muſt be our own fault if ſuch ſhould continue to be our ſituation.

A deciſive proof that this kingdom is not of neceſſity dependant for ſubſiſtence, is, that till lately it not only ſupplied itſelf, but exported largely. Perhaps this may be deemed proof ſufficient. But that the growth of corn may be greatly increaſed in this kingdom, muſt be obvious to every one who obſerves the immenſe tracts of waſte and half-cultivated lands in different parts of England. We ſometimes, in the pride of exultation, are apt to call this an highly-cultivated country, but not one fourth of it is worthy of that deſcription—much land which is now half waſte, much which is very imperfectly cultivated, might and would produce large quantities of corn, if there were any probability

bability of an adequate return for the great expence of good cultivation, by a ſteady ſufficient price for corn, which cannot be exp ted while our ports are to be open for the importation of corn from fertile and comparatively untaxed and untithed countries, at what may be called moderate or low prices. Every man who travels over England, and more eſpecially the midland counties, will obſerve, that the incloſed land, where alone the proprietor has the full power of uſing the mode of cultivation beſt ſuited to his intereſt, is far more generally in paſture than in tillage. A fair price for corn, proportioned to that which fleſh is allowed to bring, would in a few years put a large proportion of theſe paſtures under a regular courſe of crops, and without raiſing the price of meat. It is well known that a tract of land, under a good courſe of crops, which includes artificial graſſes, turneps, &c., will maintain more

more cattle, and at a cheaper rate, than if the whole were under paſture *.

In addition to what is here hinted at, very efficacious means of encouraging tillage might be deviſed, as will appear more particularly under the third diviſion which I have laid down for enquiry.

* An increaſed price of corn will make fleſh cheaper, becauſe corn, by that means, paying a larger proportion of the profit due on the capital uſed in farming, fleſh will have leſs to pay.

Thus mutton is dearer, becauſe wool is not allowed to be ſold at its natural price; ſo ſays Adam Smith, whoſe argument is, that a man muſt be paid, or he would not breed ſheep; if then the publick pays him more for his mutton than its real value, they may have his wool for leſs, as upon the whole they make it worth his while to keep the ſheep. At preſent fleſh helps to pay the deficiency in profit made by the deficiencies of corn—hence it has riſen to the conſumer ſo rapidly of late.

As

As to the ſecond queſtion, whether proper means have hitherto been uſed to promote a growth of corn equal to the demand, I think it may be fairly ſaid, that inſtead of any ſuch ſalutary endeavours we have frittered away the ſpirit of our old corn laws, partly under the viſionary expectation of attaining conſtant low prices, and partly under the idea of graſping at commercial advantages.

It is about eighteen years ago ſince we made our laſt great alteration in the corn laws. The act of the year 1773 has improved the law in one point, by regulating the opening of the ports according to an average of the prices of the diſtrict, inſtead of the prices at the ſeveral ports. All the other alterations made by the act of 1773 appear to have been much for the worſe; and the additions introduced in that act are very objectionable. Without the appearance of any great change in the ſyſtem of our corn laws,

laws, a complete revolution in them has really taken place, as will be made to appear when I ſhall obſerve on the ſeveral tables which regulate the bounties, and the prices at which the high and low duties are to take place. The corn laws were originally intended ſolely and entirely for the encouragement of tillage, and were by no means framed with a view to commerce. But we have loſt ſight of this great and leading principle, and have departed from a ſyſtem, which did not mean even to tolerate importation, except in caſe of great emergency, adopting in its ſtead a plan of commercial ſpeculation.

One of our beſt writers on political œconomy ſays, that bad ſeaſons may produce a dearth, but a famine can only be produced by bad laws. A famine has not yet taken place; but if we do not make ſome exertions, our dependance will increaſe by degrees to ſuch an height that, in caſe of a

generally bad ſeaſon, or, perhaps, of a general war, we may not be able to procure from abroad what will have become our neceſſary ſupply. A neglect of tillage, or even a neglect of extending it in proportion to the increaſed conſumption, might at laſt make an importation of an eighth; or ſuppoſe only a ninth of our whole conſumption neceſſary, namely, a million of quarters of wheat*, which, excluſive of the difficulty of paying for it, would in many ſeaſons be impoſſible for us to obtain. It has been the opinion of men who have conſidered that ſubject, and underſtood it, that ſuch a quantity could not any where

* The common computation is a quarter of corn for each inhabitant, allowing ſomething for waſte, and other uſes, beſides food. As, according to a late very accurate enumeration of the inhabitants of Ireland, they appear to be upwards of four millions, I may be allowed to ſuppoſe the inhabitants of England ſeven millions and an half, and of Scotland to be one million and an half; together, nine millions at leaſt.

be

be had in common years; and if that opinion is founded, of courſe a famine muſt enſue.

The Repreſentation of the Committee of Council tells us, Europe could not furniſh us with the quantity in queſtion, for ſhe cannot always ſupply herſelf; far leſs ſhould we depend on America—without mentioning how precarious any material ſupply from thence would be in time of war, ſhe had never, at leaſt before independance, ſent a fifth of that quantity to Europe in any one year.

As the Repreſentation of the Committee of Council ſuppoſes that neither this country nor Europe can ſupply themſelves with wheat, but all muſt depend on the American State for wheat or flour, it may not be improper in a poſtſcript to enquire what reliance there can be on that opinion.

In reſpect to the third object of enquiry, what will be the beſt means of rendering the growth of corn in Great Britain equal to the conſumption? The anſwer is ſimply, that the moſt effectual will be, to give, as far as we can, the monopoly of the home market to our farmers, not merely for their emolument, but for our own ſafety—no other means, I am perſuaded, can anſwer the purpoſe ſo well, or preſerve us ſo effectually from the calamitous ſituation of being dependant on other countries for ſubſiſtence.

Nothing ſurely can be more diſcouraging to the growth of corn in this country than that part of the bill which opens the ports to a glut of corn from all parts of the world the moment the ſmalleſt proportion of the uſual conſumption of this country is wanting, the moment its price becomes what is by no means extravagant, but on the contrary, while it is moderate, conſidering

dering the increaſed expence of tillage — nor is that part of the bill much leſs diſcouraging, which prevents exportation, as ſoon as the price is ſuch as to encourage the growth of it, and make the farmer amends for bad ſeaſons at one time, and very low prices at another.

If the price of ſugar riſes ever ſo high, the ports are never open to foreign ſugars; but if the value of corn riſes to any thing like a conſiderable price, not only the ports are opened, but importation is encouraged by admitting corn for three months certain from untaxed countries, paying ſcarce a nominal duty.

In the caſe of other great native commodities, except where a monopoly is given of a raw material to a manufacture, the ports are always open for exportation; and if there is any danger in our own markets from foreign competition, the article is protected

tected by prohibitory or high duties; and whatever revenue is raiſed on that article, or paid by thoſe employed in it, can be demanded from the conſumer, as always ſhould be the caſe. But in reſpect to corn, the moment the price riſes to that which cannot afford much encouragement, but barely pay the expence of growing it, the farmer is checked, and, by the opening of the ports as already deſcribed, he is prevented from receiving a juſt return for his anxious labour and riſk of capital.

The ill-judged meaſure of forcing a low price of bread corn is the leſs neceſſary in a country where the poor receives relief whenever the price exceeds what is moderate—and it ſhould be recollected, that almoſt the whole of that heavy tax levied for the poor, amounting to more than two millions yearly, is paid by the very land which is ſo oppreſſed by our injudicious corn laws.

It is far, however, from certain, that a low price for corn is advantageous to our manufactures; on the contrary, it appears that they are aſſiſted by ſomewhat of a high price, and that high-priced proviſions and induſtry are in general conſtant companions, at leaſt in Europe. Thoſe who will give themſelves the trouble of enquiry will find, that moſt work is done when corn is dear. Every body knows, that, in this kingdom, if the manufacturer can gain as much in three or four days as will maintain him for a week, he will be idle the two or three firſt days of the week—But one day's extra labour will amply pay the difference between what is deemed by our laws a moderate or high price; or one hour's work per day for a week would amount to the ſame thing.

The Committee of Council admits there is more regularity of conduct, and productive induſtry, when the price of corn is not

not unuſually low, yet ſays it is neceſſary for the country labourer that proviſions ſhould be low. It would certainly be better, however undeſirable, to raiſe the price of labour, than to ruin agriculture; but thoſe who are acquainted with the real ſtate of the country, and know the relief that is given to the poor and large families whenever the price of corn exceeds what is moderate, will probably think it better to ſuffer the price of labour to find its level, than to raiſe that price indiſcriminately, beyond what is neceſſary for a ſmall family, to what may be neceſſary for a large one.

It is a ſteady price that is to be wiſhed for, not a low price; and that regular price can only be obtained by our growing more corn than we can conſume, and by encouraging the export of the ſurplus. I muſt further add, that the landed intereſt being pledged by the poor laws to ſupply all

all deficiencies, have thence the beſt claim to fix the prices at which the ports ſhould be open or ſhut in reſpect to corn.

The people of England muſt be always ſupplied with bread corn; but if they ſhould have it at preſent at a price inferior to that at which, climate and taxes combined, their own country can afford to produce it, in the end they will be ſubjected to great diſtreſs, becauſe the growth of corn will be diſcouraged.

Perhaps ſome men will think more favourably of agriculture, and of the neceſſity of encouraging tillage, if they conſider it as a manufacture, which it is in reality almoſt as much as that of woollens—It furniſhes the materials of, and ſupports other manufactures—More induſtry is employed in it than in any among the many which help to enrich this country, or in the producing of any other commodity—

It would be better to depend on other countries for cloathing, than for bread, meat, and drink. Why ſhould we give a monopoly of the ſupply to the manufacturers of wool, and not to the manufacturers or tillers of land? We have only to do in reſpect to corn, what is done in reſpect to all other conſiderable commodities; that is, ſecure the home market to the farmer. He has a right to it on every principle of equity, reaſon, and good policy — for that purpoſe little more is required than the ſimple operation of raiſing the prices and duties to what they were, and by returning to the old ſpirit of encouraging agriculture. In this would be no revolution, no change that could excite a juſt apprehenſion to the leaſt enterprizing, or moſt timid miniſter; there would be no reliance on doubtful ſpeculation; and there can be little queſtion but that the reſtoration of our old law, with a little addition, would in a ſhort time manifeſt that we are not neceſſarily dependant

dant on other countries for ſubſiſtence, and prove that we can raiſe an ample ſupply, not only for our increaſed conſumption, but alſo for that of our dependencies. I am not in general a friend to forcing any thing by bounties and prohibitions, except in the caſe of new eſtabliſhments, and then it ſhould be done only for a limited time; but the caſe of agriculture is totally different from thoſe that are merely commercial; and unleſs we enable our ſurplus corn to go in competition to a foreign market, we have not a chance of raiſing near enough for our own conſumption in unfavourable ſeaſons. No man would riſk the expence of ſowing more corn than will anſwer the demand in a favourable year, unleſs he is ſure to diſpoſe of the ſurplus at a reaſonable price, by carrying it with fair advantage to markets.

One of the objections to monopolies, bounties, and duties, is, that they turn to-

wards particular articles a greater ſhare of labour and capital than would have otherwiſe gone to them and that they often divert men from a more advantageous employment to one that is leſs ſo. There can be no ſuch apprehenſion in reſpect to agriculture, from which we have turned too much of our capital; and of that meaſure we are now feeling the bad effects.

The ſame arguments apply in favour of a preference to agriculture, which do in regard to our famous navigation laws. The monopolies, the bounties, and prohibitions of the latter, are neceſſary to enable us to defend our empire, our properties, and our liberties: the monopolies, bounties, and duties, which I argue for in favour of agriculture, are calculated to prevent our being dependant on other countries for ſubſiſtence, which has gradually become our caſe, and will be ſo in a much greater degree, if we even do not do ſomething more than

than maintain the greater part of our old ſyſtem in favour of tillage.

It ſeems difficult, on any plain principle of reaſon, to account for the alteration of the corn laws of Charles the Second and William the Third, which took place in the year 1773, and particularly for the reduction then made of the prices at which the ports were to be open for exportation and importation, and ſhut againſt the latter, and that thoſe prices ſhould be put below what was thought reaſonable above one hundred years ago, eſpecially when we conſider how much the value of money has decreaſed, and the expence of tillage had increaſed during that period. This nation had flouriſhed and done well under their ſyſtem of corn bounties and prices during almoſt a century. Our tillage was greatly improved, and our exportation of corn had become a great trade.

We

We learn from the Repreſentation of the Committee of Council how conſiderable the change has been in the laſt twenty years—I do not mean to aſſert that this alarming change has ariſen entirely from the alteration of the corn laws; other cauſes certainly have contributed to it; but I wiſh the alteration had never been made. Its tendency, undoubtedly, is to keep down the price of corn, and conſequently to diſcourage tillage: but a due encouragement of that which is of more real conſequence to us than all other conſiderations whatever, will not only bring much land, now unprofitable, into tillage, but may reſtore to the plough great quantities of excellent corn land, which, on its encloſure, has been turned to paſture.

For the purpoſe of obſerving accurately on the bounties and prices, it may be better to examine them in the order in which they ſtand in the bill.

The

The firſt table, A, ſhews the prices under which certain bounties are allowed on exportation of the ſeveral ſorts of corn, and they are the ſame to which they were reduced by the act of 1773, viz. 5s. per quarter on wheat when under 44s.; 3s. on rye under 28s.; 2s. 6d. on barley and big under 22s.; and 2s. on oats under 14s.

For the reaſons already given, I would raiſe the prices under which the bounty ſhould be allowed to what they were at the Revolution, namely, of wheat to 48s., rye to 32s., barley and big to 24s., oats to 15s. —the bounties on flour, meal, and malt, to be in proportion. Perhaps it might be better to regulate the bounties ſomewhat differently; for example: on wheat, 7s. 6d. under 44s., and 3s. 6d. between 44 and 48s.—by which means tillage would be moſt encouraged, when ſome encouragement was moſt wanted; that is, when the price is loweſt; and the expence to the country,

country, in reſpect to bounty, probably would be leſs than it would be if always kept at 5s.: but however reaſonable this may be, bounties are not the point on which I ſhould make the greateſt ſtruggle, becauſe many object to the expence of bounties; and there are other points on which it ſeems much more neceſſary to make exertions.

The table B. ſhews the prices at, or above, which exportation is to be prohibited. It is eſſential, in my view of this ſubject, that they alſo ſhould be, at leaſt, reſtored to what they were before the 13th of George the Third. The preſent bill has the merit of going half the way I would propoſe, in reſpect to all corn, except barley and big; and I ſuppoſe the conſideration of the advantage to be gained by the malting thoſe articles has occaſioned this difference. If there is to be a diſtinction made between grain and flour, or meal or malt,

it

it is not unreaſonable; but then I think it ſhould be general. We might, with equal propriety, check the export of all corn until it is manufactured into flour or bread, as of barley, before it becomes malt.

The prohibition price of the export of wheat, for near a century, had been at 48s.; rye, peaſe, and beans, at 32s.; barley and big at 28s.; oats at 16s. Theſe prices were reduced, by the 13th of George the Third, to 44s. wheat, 28s. rye, 22s. barley, and 14s. oats. The preſent bill reſtores half that was taken off, and ſeems to admit that there ſhould have been no reduction, except on barley, and on that it advances only one ſhilling: ſurely it cannot be too much to deſire that the prices ſhould be what were deemed reaſonable 128 years ago, for it is ſo long ſince that they were fixed.

But it would ſurely be adviſeable to allow

the export of corn to continue, when the price of corn is ſomething higher than that at which the bounty ceaſes; and the Committee of Council ſeems to be of the ſame opinion.

It would be an encouragement to agriculture if the ports were open for exportation, till the price of wheat is at 53s. and 4d., which, under the table D, will be propoſed as the price at which the high duties ſhould ceaſe.

The table C. ſhews the quantities of corn, flour, and biſcuit, which may be exported to particular dependencies of the Britiſh empire. I ſhould like this table better if it allowed an export from this country equal to their conſumption, eſpecially to the Weſt-India Colonies, which cannot raiſe ſufficient for themſelves; and it ſhould be, as I conceive, without the neceſſity of applying to the Privy Council. We know with

with the utmoſt exactneſs how much it would amount to; and inſtead of declining it at any time, we ought to aſſert, at all times, the monopoly of their ſupply in every article we can furniſh, otherwiſe we loſe the advantage of colonies, in the return they ſhould make for the monopoly of our markets, and the expence of protecting them.

The Planters cannot object to our having their entire ſupply, without depriving themſelves of the only argument worth attention, in caſe a propoſition ſhould be made to import foreign ſugars—and this country need not dread the export at any time of the quantity of flour which the Britiſh Weſt Indies require—the whole annual ſupply, on an average of three years, ending 1789, being 162,506 barrels—about as much as is conſumed in Great Britain in four days. It will be recollected how few comparatively the number of Whites are in the

Britiſh Weſt Indies, and that wheaten flour is not the food of the Negroes.

The table D, which ſhews the prices according to which high or low duties are to be paid on importation, is of ſtill more conſequence than any of the other tables. And here I muſt repeat the complaint againſt the alteration of the prices fixed in Charles the Second's reign. If any alteration was to be made, the decreaſe of the value of money naturally required, that inſtead of reducing the importation prices they ſhould have been raiſed, as one of the beſt means of encouraging tillage.

I would propoſe, therefore, that the high duty ſhould not ceaſe until wheat was at 53s, and 4d.; rye, beans, and peaſe, at 40s.; and barley at 32s.; which only brings the prices back to what they were before the 13th of George the Third; at leaſt we ought to try the experiment, whether

ther theſe prices will be ſufficient to encourage a growth of corn equal to our conſumption; and as they were reckoned moderate 120 years ago, till they amounted to the above ſums, ſurely they may be now deemed ſo, eſpecially as I muſt repeat it, when we conſider the great additional expences that have ſince fallen on tillage. In reſpect to wheat, I ſhould add, that the Committee of Council ſeems to admit the price to be moderate till it amounts to 48s.; but as a very ſmall deficiency of crop will raiſe the price greatly, and as the next price to a moderate is not a very high one, the ports ſhould not be immediately opened on the low duties juſt where the moderate price is ſuppoſed to ceaſe, and where the bounty on export uſed to ceaſe. The reſtoration, therefore, of the old price at which the low duties ſhould commence, viz. 53s. and 4d. will give the ſpace which ſeems proper between the price at which the bounty

bounty is no longer allowed, and that which is deemed an high one.

And as an argument againſt the import of wheat until the average price of the kingdom, amounts to 53s. and 4d., it ſhould be obſerved, that the permiſſion to import into particular diſtricts, namely, e northern, when the price there is at 48s. per quarter, operates on the ſouthern corn counties nearly the ſame as an importation at 43 or 44s. The corn counties depend on the northern diſtricts for a market. The expence of carrying coaſtwiſe, including freight, inſurance, and all charges, amounting to 4 or 5s. per quarter, muſt therefore be deducted from 48s.; and thus foreign wheat, inferior in quality, often unwholeſome and unfit for bread, is, in fact, admitted, when the price in the counties where corn is grown is at 43 or 44s., and the grower of corn has not the encouragement the Legiſlature intended. But above all,

all, I am anxious to maintain the low duties of our old law, namely, 8s. per quarter on wheat till the price is 4l. It will be a ſubſtantial encouragement to the growth of wheat; and as the country was able to pay it 120 years ago, ſurely it may do ſo now. I ſhould add, that the great increaſe of tillage which took place, and enabled us to ſend ſo much corn abroad, has been almoſt univerſally attributed to the regulation which I propoſe to reſtore.

If, however, the Legiſlature think it neceſſary to yield to prejudices, and ſacrifice the intereſts of tillage to thoſe of the conſumer, and is determined to keep down the price of bread corn at all events; at leaſt it may attend to the true intereſt of the country, ſo far as relates to other ſpecies of corn, and may admit any propoſition in reſpect to it, that can encourage tillage. Every man who knows any thing of agriculture is aware, that by encouraging

ing one particular kind you promote the growth of other kinds of corn, and that a courſe of crops is neceſſary in moſt ſoils to ſecure a tolerable produce; it is indifferent to the farmer which of thoſe crops pays his expences. There is no kind of corn, the growth of which at preſent ſeems to require encouragement more than oats. The importation is become prodigious; it increaſes, and is likely to increaſe greatly, unleſs the diſcouragements to tillage are removed. Our ports are almoſt perpetually open to the importation of them, becauſe the price at which they may be entered, paying only 3d. per quarter, is ſo low as 16s. It muſt be obvious, that the admiſſion of foreign oats, (which are generally, except the beſt from the Low Countries, 20 per cent. cheaper than Britiſh) as ſoon as the price in our markets reach to 16s., cannot fail to diſcourage the growth of that article, eſpecially when we conſider that the farmer may not get more than 14s.,

the

the waſte and the expence of carrying coaſt-wiſe to our principal markets, only from our eaſtern coaſts, amounting, at leaſt, to 2s. per quarter at a medium. So low a price holds out no advantage to the grower; and he certainly will not put himſelf to any extraordinary expence to raiſe an article, the proper value of which is perpetually liable to be debaſed by admitting it from all countries, the moſt fertile, and the leaſt taxed. Much land, which from its poverty, or diſtance from manures, or on account of the expence of draining and cultivation, will not now make a ſufficient return to the farmer, would, if he could be ſure of an adequate price in return for the cultivation, produce large quantities of oats.—We depreſs agriculture in favour of the Dutch, and other nations—we pay for draining their lands, while many hundred thouſands of our acres lye waſte; and this will ever be the caſe, if we do not protect our agriculture either by an equalizing

duty, which ſhould never be lower than five ſhillings per quarter on oats, or by not opening the ports on the low duty until the price is at leaſt 21s.

As oats are bread corn in Scotland, the gentlemen of that country will propoſe what they think proper in reſpect to that kingdom. But it may here be obſerved, that they have had the good ſenſe not to open their ports to the importation until its price is equal to 19s. and 2½d. our quarter.

It is of little conſequence what we pay for oats, compared to the encouragement of agriculture. Stablekeepers, although they have a profit of 50 per cent., at the leaſt, on oats, even when at high prices, will object to my propoſal; and alſo ſome others who may have an advantage from the importation: but ſurely the wiſhes of theſe perſons will not be put in competition with the

the publick good, eſpecially as they have little right to complain; ſince it is in their power to redreſs themſelves, if the price ſhould be really high, by charging an advance to the conſumer. The farmer has not the ſame power. When the ports and immenſe warehouſes of foreign corn are ſuddenly opened on him, while the price is only moderate, he cannot make himſelf amends for a damaged or a half crop; he muſt go to market; corn is of a periſhable nature. There can be no combination among the growers of corn in England. The article is in too many hands: we are therefore ſure there can be no monopoly of it: the farmer muſt ſell it at 6s. per buſhel, although, in conſequence of bad ſeaſons and bad crops, he is not able to afford it ſo low. The conſequence of this muſt be, that he will not ſow, unleſs, in caſe of loſing a part of his crop, he can make himſelf ſome amends, by ſelling the remaining part at a better price. But al-

though there can be no combination among the farmers of Great Britain, there may be monopolies and combinations among thoſe who warehouſe foreign corn.

It will, perhaps, be objected, that the raiſing the low duty on oats to 5s., or not opening the ports till the price is at 21s., will raiſe the price until a ſufficient quantity of land has been brought into tillage to ſupply the conſumption. To this it may be anſwered, that the price is now generally about 21s.; and that, independent of the neceſſary encouragement to ſupply ourſelves, we had better pay 5s. per quarter for Britiſh than for foreign labour; that when we have reached the deſired point, of raiſing ſufficient for our conſumption, the competition at market will bring the price to its proper level. In the mean time a duty of 5s. per quarter will produce ſome revenue—it will amply pay the bounty on the exportation of other corn.

Such

Such a tax on the conſumption of oats would gratify many who are fond of taxes on luxury; for on whom will it fall? On none but thoſe who can redreſs themſelves, or can beſt afford to pay it. The farmer raiſes the oats he wants; but if he ſhould feel the expence ſo much as to turn him from the uſe of horſes to that of oxen, which require no oats, it would be better for himſelf, and for the community. The daily increaſed expence to the carrier would not be conſiderable. It would not be felt by the manufacturer, more eſpecially as the greater part of his goods are carried by water. Whether we are to pay one penny, or even two-pence a day more, for each coach or ſaddle horſe, while we reſide in this town, is not of quite ſo much conſequence as the encouragement of agriculture.

But the whole of the reaſoning which may be ſuppoſed to be urged againſt the meaſure

meaſure turns upon the idea of a ſpecies of land product becoming dearer by the encouraging the growth of it, a notion which all experience controverts; for a few years the price would riſe; but this riſe would be a direct premium upon the culture of our waſtes, particularly our moors and fens, on which ſoils oats are the principal crop; and ſuch increaſed cultivation would gradually counteract ſuch riſe of price, and tend ſtrongly to reduce it nearly to the preſent rates: but in the mean tir the national intereſt would be powerfully promoted. The experiment would prove, in this inſtance, as in ſo many others, that raiſing the price of any commodity is, of all other means, the ſureſt to command plenty; and that, on the contrary, the ill policy of aiming, with ſome crooked or ſiniſter view, at ſinking prices, is the ſure method to work a diſappointment: ſuch a policy diſcourages production, and a riſe of price muſt be the conſequence, as the framers

mers of the new bill may probably find to be the caſe in wheat.

All other grain, which is not bread-corn, ſhould have the ſame equalizing duties, or, at leaſt, the prices at which the low duties are to be paid, ſhould be raiſed, as already propoſed, to what they were in Charles the Second's time.

Under this head it ſhould be obſerved, that the Committee of Council, in the repreſentation to the King, has propoſed, that wheat ſhould be allowed to be imported into this kingdom from Ireland on the low duties when the price is at or above 46s., and other ſorts of corn when the prices ſhall be in like proportion; and that this regulation ſhall take place whenever the Parliament of Ireland ſhall make a like regulation in favour of Britiſh corn. The principle of this propoſition might be accepted by the landed intereſt of Great Britain,

tain, if the import prices ſhould be raiſed as had been propoſed. For example; when the ports are open on the low duties for wheat from foreign countries at 53s. and 4d., it might be admitted from Ireland on the ſame duties at 48s. On this plan the landed intereſt will gain, at leaſt, a better ſecurity than they now have; for no corn will be brought in ſooner than by the preſent law, and foreign corn will be excluded conſiderably longer. The import will be gradual, and only in proportion to the want; and ſpeculiſts in the corn of the Baltick and of the American States will not have the power of pouring in ſuch quantities as can glut the market, or reduce the price of Britiſh corn far below the ſtandard fixed for the farmer's encouragement.

According to the preſent law, the whole world may pour in corn upon the Britiſh grower at 48s.; and under the regulation propoſed, all corn, except Iriſh, will be excluded

cluded till it riſes to 53s. and 4d. Corn may be at 48s. per quarter when we do not want a great quantity; and we may in ſuch caſe, and eſpecially through the ſyſtem of warehouſing, be ſo overglutted inſtantly by a general import as to have the price reduced far below 48s.; whereas, by a partial import, we ſhall avoid the danger of ſuch an overflow; and if Ireland can ſupply our wants at ſuch a time, they will be anſwered without creating a ſudden and injurious fall of prices. At the ſame time corn would not be importable from Ireland at lower prices than it has been during the laſt eighteen years; and if the equalizing duties which are propoſed to take place at all times ſhould be adopted, they will be a great protection to the Britiſh grower of corn, although theſe equalizing duties ſhould be put ſomewhat lower on Iriſh than on foreign corn—at the ſame time the quantity of wheat or flour Ireland can ſpare could not ruin our market—perhaps it may

appear of ſome moment to the manufacturing part of Great Britain, that ſuch a regulation tends to bring the price of corn to a level in both kingdoms, when it is dear in Britain, and has no effect when it is cheap.

This regulation may alſo be a good compromiſe between thoſe who think it neceſſary to encourage importation in favour of manufactures, and thoſe who object to it, as ruinous to tillage.

On the ſame principle other kinds of corn might be admitted from Ireland on proportionate duties.

But amongſt all the proviſions of this bill, there is none which appears to me more objectionable than that which promotes the ſtoring of foreign corn at the publick expence. It would be difficult to propoſe any meaſure more injurious to our own tillage,

lage, and more advantageous to the corn trade of other countries.

On a ſlight view of the ſubject, there ſeems to be ſomething captivating in the words, " make Britain the emporium, the " magazine for foreign wheat;" but if the publick are to pay for ſtoring large magazines of foreign corn, to be poured out upon our farmers at a moment's warning, thereby depreciating the ſtock which they have in hand, and diſappointing their reaſonable hopes of advantage, we ſhall have little cauſe for congratulating ourſelves on Britain's becoming the *depot* or market for foreign wheat. The privilege will be a ruinous one to Britiſh agriculture *.

Mr.

* The accumulations of wheat ſtored at Liverpool amounted, at one period, to 40,030 quarters, the produce (at twenty buſhels an acre) of 16,012 acres of land. This quantity, for the purchaſe of which 30,000l, at the leaſt, muſt have been paid to foreign-

Mr. Smith, who publiſhed ſome tracts on corn above thirty years ago (1758), and is eſteemed one of our beſt writers on the ſubject, ſpeaking of forming magazines of corn, ſays, " it would become a very great " diſcouragement to tillage, and in the end " make corn dearer than before, as the far- " mer, ſeeing large quantities collected to- " gether, might imagine corn would never " bear a price for the future; and the fear " of the market being ſpoiled by the ma- " gazines being opened, would prevent all " private perſons from keeping a ſufficient " quantity by them to carry on their buſi-

ers, was, by a return of the Quarter Seſſions, let looſe at once upon the market in the middle of July; the very time when the Britiſh farmer begins to look forward to reap the fruits of his induſtry, and receive payment for the expence of tilling his land. Average the quantity at 500 quarters a veſſel, and it will appear that eighty ſail of ſuch veſſels muſt arrive in one day to produce the ſame effect on the Britiſh market.

" neſs,

" neſs with profit, and conſequently tillage
" would decreaſe, the trade would be in a
" manner abandoned, and many ill conſe-
" quences, at preſent impoſſible to be fore-
" ſeen, would follow."

But the objections to immenſe magazines of corn, *entirely foreign*, are infinitely ſtronger than the publick magazines to which Mr. Smith alluded. Every body knows the arts that are uſed, and the frauds that are committed reſpecting the corn trade; and that dealers, by ſelling and reſelling to each other large quantities of corn in a fallacious manner, have hitherto opened and ſhut the ports of a diſtrict for importation or exportation as beſt ſuited their purpoſes. The ports may be opened through bad information, through ill-founded apprehenſion: in ſhort, they may, according to this bill, be opened very improperly. If the crops fail not more than the 500th part of the neceſſary ſupply of the people, the ports

muſt

muſt be opened, and remain ſo for three months; or even when there is not an actual ſcarcity. It is well known, that the mere apprehenſion of want, without abſolute want, will raiſe the price of corn; and if any part of the uſual conſumption is wanting, the price will riſe more than proportionably to the quantity wanted. The ports once opened, the great opportunities afforded by the extenſive canals which communicate with our ports will allow immenſe quantities of foreign corn to be ſent ſuddenly from the magazines, propoſed to be eſtabliſhed in all our ports by this bill, into the interior parts of the country, greatly to the prejudice of the farmer, of the landed intereſt, and of the agriculture of the kingdom.

Although, perhaps, it may ſeldom happen that any one particular country can throw in corn enough utterly to ruin our home market, yet the ports being always

open

open to ſtore wheat and flour, our character for riches and high prices will induce all countries to ſend their corn and flour to wait the opportunity of pouring it into the heart of the kingdom. The ſpirit of commerce will at times induce all countries, and poſſibly all at once, to ſend their corn here, and often to a cheaper market. It was the caſe, in ſome reſpects, in 1789; while America made an effort to ſend corn hither, wheat was conſiderably dearer at Philadelphia than in London.

Previous to the laſt opening of the port of Liverpool to corn on the low duties, above eighty places of depoſit were occupied in that town, and ſome part of the corn had been upwards of eighteen months warehouſed. When once landed and ſtored, it will often anſwer better to the merchant to ſend it at prime coſt, or even lower, to our home market, than to reſhip, inſure, and pay freight, to carry it farther. Theſe circum-

circumſtances will depreſs our market below what may be at the time a reaſonable price, conſidering the harveſt.

It is obvious that great miſchief may ariſe from too great a reduction of the price of grain in a year of ſcarcity; for whenever there is a great check given to any branch of induſtry, thoſe employed in it may be induced to abandon it, greatly to the prejudice of the community. It ſhould be repeated, the farmer, *on ſuch occaſions*, has no means to make himſelf amends for the low price of corn; but when a low price proceeds from plenty, he has an additional quantity to pay his expences. In ſhort, the price ſhould not be reduced but in proportion to the crop in the country, and the quantity wanted; and the more that is wanted, the leſs ſhould the price be reduced. The diminution of price ſhould be in proportion to the plenty of the year. That wheat ſhould be as cheap in

bad

bad harveſts as in good, ſurely can never be expected, nor is it juſt: but the tendency of the bill is clearly to oblige us to ſell wheat at a cheaper rate than that at which we can fairly grow it.

Compared to other objections, the mere expence of ſtoring, now meant to be thrown on the publick, may appear of no great conſequence; yet the amount of that expence for the whole kingdom would be very conſiderable. Liverpool had at one time 147 warehouſe rooms wherein flour and corn were ſtored; the expence of which, and of the officers to attend and air and turn the corn, was certainly no ſmall object. From January to April, 1790, 70,786 quarters of oats were imported into that town from Ireland. Had that quantity been warehouſed at the publick charge, it would have cauſed an expence of at leaſt 140l. per week, or near 7300l. per annum, only for that quantity, and for that one place.

It is well known, that the power of importing and warehouſing corn did not exiſt in this country till the 13th of the preſent King, and that ſuch a power was not in the bill at firſt offered to the houſe by Mr. Pownall, but that it was far advanced before he introduced it, at the ſuggeſtion of Mr. Dobſon, a corn merchant in Liverpool; and that that power was only intended to be exerciſed under certain limitations. He was aware, as I have been told, as well as many others, that the warehouſing corn in general would have a very bad effect on the agriculture of the country.

It ſeems to me, I confeſs, as if none but a corn dealer had been conſidered or conſulted in framing this part of the bill.—Now, though the man who trades in corn may be very reſpectable, yet he has, as to the corn laws, but a temporary and ſelfiſh intereſt in them, compared with the man of landed property, the farmer, and the publick

at

at large: not that I think any number of men will be hurt by the omiſſion of the clauſe in queſtion, even as to their private intereſt, but that the advantage they may loſe at preſent by unſeaſonable importations, they will more than regain by an increaſed exportation hereafter. Our merchants may trade in corn from the Baltick to the Mediterranean without landing it in this country: they may carry corn from Ireland, whoſe ports are now likely to be always open for exportation, to Spain, Portugal, or the Mediterranean: but this I am ſure of, that if the clauſe in queſtion ſhould paſs into a law, they will in future have very little or no corn to carry from this country.

It may here be remarked, that the ſpirit of commerce ſhould not be indulged, wherever it can in the leaſt prejudice agriculture, and that we ought not to ſuffer local circumſtances, nor the particular advantage of ports, to interfere with the general intereſt

of the country, and eſpecially with the growth of corn, the object by far of the greateſt conſequence, whether we conſider it in reſpect to population, or dependance on other countries for ſubſiſtence.

If we are to benefit by example, we may ſee that agriculture has been favoured beyond manufactures or trade in thoſe countries that have been moſt populous and richeſt.

In return for the great revenue paid by land, in return for the enormous taxes paid for the poor of all trades, the landed intereſt, including landowner as well as landholder, is entitled to the ſupply of the home market; at the ſame time it ſhould be obſerved, that the ſupply of the home market, and the intereſt of tillage, are much more effectually promoted by the proſperity of the inland, than by the importation and exportation trade: and in

ſo

ſo ſtrong a light do I ſee the ill conſequence of warehouſing, that, notwithſtanding the bounties on export ſeem neceſſary to encourage tillage, and give us any chance of a market for our corn in foreign countries, yet I ſhould much rather give up thoſe bounties entirely than admit the clauſe in queſtion.

In ſhort, if the bill paſſes as it is now framed, I ſhall conſider it as little better than allowing a direct importation. In truth, it would be much worſe, in every reſpect, than repealing all our laws relative to corn; for, according to the preſent bill, we ſhall be liable to all the diſadvantages of reſtrictions on trade, without enjoying any of the advantages which generally reſult from a freedom from ſuch reſtraints.

Under the head of ſtoring corn, ſhould be noticed a power permitted by the bill, of taking corn out of the warehouſes in order

to

to be ground, and then exported. If the warehouſing clauſe ſhould not paſs, this of courſe will fall; but if that ſhould be received, this will be ſtill objectionable. It can anſwer little purpoſe, except to encourage frauds. The advantage of grinding the quantity likely to be re-exported is a very trifling object, and thoſe particularly who do not like that the corn or flour of this country ſhould go out of it, will be apprehenſive that any rubbiſh or bad corn may be introduced under the pretence of grinding; that bad or unwholeſome flour from that corn will be ſold to our people, and that our good flour will be exported in its place. It is ridiculous to ſuppoſe we can ſecure, by any law whatever, the re-exportation of the very ſame corn that was taken from the warehouſes.

The clauſe may have been ſuggeſted by a miller; but there are thoſe who think it would be a much more reaſonable deſire on his

his part, and much more proper for the Legiſlature, to enact, that no flour ſhould be imported into this kingdom, and that all corn, when the ports are open, ſhould be admitted only in the ſtate of grain, except from Ireland. That country has wiſely prohibited the import of flour, except from Great Britain. Preſerving the reciprocal preference, the example is worthy of imitation; by which means the manufacture and advantage will be reſerved for our own mills, in reſpect to corn, from all other countries.

To this, however, it is objected, that in times of ſcarcity it might be a means of throwing a dangerous monopoly into the hands of our great millers, or might produce a dearth, if the ſcarcity ſhould commence with a hard froſt, or a dry ſeaſon, and if there ſhould be no flour, except in the hands of the millers. This ſuppoſes Iriſh flour under the ſame prohibitory duty

as

as foreign, which is not intended. However, I find there are very reſpectable opinions, that one ſhilling per cwt. on the import of flour will be too high, and that 6d. per cwt. will be ſufficient.

The bill is announced as intended to form a permanent law; and every man who attends to the ſubject, will acknowledge how highly neceſſary it is that it ſhould be ſo. Great, therefore, muſt be the ſurpriſe to find a ſuſpending power given to the Privy Council, which deſtroys all permanency of ſyſtem, all confidence in the ſteadineſs of ſettled laws, and conſequently all ſpirit of ſpeculation in the growth, the manufacture, and the trade, of corn. That Government ſhould wiſh to have ſuch a power, is ſomewhat unaccountable: it expoſes them to be haraſſed by ſolicitations, direct and indirect, and to be practiſed on by every artifice and miſrepreſentation that can be deviſed to miſlead them. At the

ſame

ſame time the neceſſity of allowing a diſpenſing power is by no means ſhewn in the Repreſentation of the Committee of Council, which affects to aſſign reaſons for each head of the bill.

I particularly object to truſting them with the power in queſtion, as in the Repreſentation of the Committee of Council the words, "Popular commotion and tu-"mults," occur often enough to ſhew too great an apprehenſion and a diſpoſition to give way to the effects of ignorance and prejudice. When ſuch a diſpoſition appears, it muſt be obvious that there will not be wanting thoſe who will attempt to make an impreſſion, and that it will not be very difficult to promote a tumult or commotion in a port or market town.

It may here be obſerved, that great warehouſes of corn, inſtead of preventing, are likely to promote popular tumult. On va-

rious miſtaken notions, to which the lower ranks are very liable, they will be a provoking temptation to plunder.

I ſhall on this head make only one more obſervation, namely, that to cite precedents from the reigns of Richard II., Henry VI., Philip and Mary, and Elizabeth, does not of courſe reconcile us to the idea of a diſpenſing power.

The bill contains other matter very objectionable, the detail of which would only embarraſs thoſe parts which may, in ſome degree, be conſidered as general heads. I cannot but diſlike the whole ſyſtem of inſpection, as the erection of an office of inquiſition into the private concerns of individuals, equally inimical to the ſpirit of commerce as to general liberty. Even if it were proved, which is by no means the caſe, that the regulations provided by the preſent law for opening and ſhutting the ports, are

ſo

ſo deficient as not to be capable of amendment: nothing but abſolute neceſſity, and an object of the greateſt moment, could juſtify the introduction of ſuch a new ſyſtem as that propoſed. The preſent bill requires a weekly account of every tranſaction in trade, ſo far as it reſpects the purchaſe of corn. Next year the grazier, the clothier, the dealer in any article, may be put under the ſame trammels, and no argument will be admitted againſt the principle, becauſe it is eſtabliſhed in the corn laws.

Under the exciſe laws confiſcations of ſhips were introduced. This principle, bad as it is, was extended to the laws, and ſince to the manifeſt act; and no objection to the principle will now be allowed as valid, becauſe there are precedents for it.

Every day's experience ſhews the ſevere hardſhips to which the innocent owners of

ſhips are expoſed from the ignorance or villany of perſons, over whom they have no controul, and by tranſactions to which they cannot be privy: they are liable to the confiſcation of their ſhips for acts which they could not prevent by any poſſible care of their own, or precaution in the choice of their captain or officers. A pound of biſcuit, or an ounce of flour, may, under the bill, confiſcate a ſhip of any value—and the clauſe, limiting the tonnage of the ſhips above which the Commiſſioners ſhould have a diſcretionary power to ſet aſide the penalties of the act, will not be conſidered as obviating the objection. Even if the veſſel is reſtored, the detenſion of her, or the loſs of a voyage, is very prejudicial to commerce in general, and the expence and anxiety attending the recovery, are very ſerious evils to the ſhip owners. Inſtead of diſcouraging, every thing ſhould be done to encourage our principal merchants to be ſhip owners; and it muſt be obvious, that

heavy

heavy pecuniary penalties, for which, in moſt inſtances, the real offender might be made reſponſible, would anſwer every purpoſe of prevention, juſt as much as the exorbitant confiſcation of a very valuable ſhip belonging to a man by no means culpable, but who employs his capital in the manner which the Legiſlature ſhould encourage by all means poſſible, as that which is moſt beneficial to the empire.

Notwithſtanding I ſee ſo much difficulty in the conſideration of the bill, what I have ſuggeſted, by way of alteration or improvement, is perfectly ſimple. On a ſubject of ſuch deep concern, I ſhould think it blameable to obtrude merely ſpeculative opinions. I do not expect from thoſe who have the principal guidance of this important bill, that they ſhould undertake any great revolution in the ſyſtem of the corn laws; neither ſhould I recommend to them ſo great a change as has been propoſed by ſome men,

men, very reſpectable for their abilities and writings. The complicated ſtate of Europe, and, indeed of the world at large, will not admit of ſo ſimple a ſyſtem as a perfectly unlimited free trade in corn; and it would, perhaps, be particularly objectionable on our part, leſt it ſhould in the end render us dependant on foreign countries for ſubſiſtance. What I venture to propoſe will not be a revolution, but rather a reſtoration of the old principle of the corn laws; and I truſt that, however ſpecious opinions may be to the contrary, it will be thought fit and neceſſary to maintain prohibitory duties on the import of corn, until there is a real ſcarcity, and an equalizing duty at all times on corn coming from untaxed and untythed countries, into one that is heavily taxed and tythed; and further, that it will appear expedient to give a bounty on exportation, in order to enable the farmer to diſpoſe of his ſurplus on reaſonable terms;

terms; the only means, in my judgement, of ſecuring an abundant growth of corn.

There are able men who think there ſhould be no other ſhutting of the ports, in reſpect to exportation, than that which will naturally take place when an extraordinary ſcarcity raiſes the price of corn. That ſcarcity would rarely, poſſibly never, happen, if the cultivation of the iſland was carried any thing like as far as it would bear, and to which it might be brought by encouragement; but if it ſhould happen, the conſequent price of corn would ſoon produce ſuch inconſiderable ſupplies as we might want from other countries, and this argument is urged not only in favour of tillage, but alſo to prevent our being thrown out of the trade of corn, and the turning it into other hands by the frequent and continued ſtops to exportation; but as a neceſſary attention to the encouragement of agriculture ſhould not allow the ports always to

be

be open to importation, it, perhaps, will not be thought reaſonable that they ſhould be always open for exportation.

It will be obſerved, that the objections I have offered, are not ſo much pointed to that which is new in the bill now under conſideration, as to the act of the 13th of the preſent King. But I cannot help expreſſing ſome degree of ſurpriſe, that thoſe who drew up the Repreſentation of the Committee of Council, and ſtated therein ſo ſtrongly the preſent dependance of this kingdom on foreign countries for ſubſiſtence, ſhould have adopted that act almoſt entirely. Yet when I object to the proceedings of that Committee, it is not without deference, becauſe I am ſatisfied that a noble Lord who preſides there, of whoſe extraordinary information and maturity of reaſon I have an high opinion, has paid that attention to the ſubject which deſerves the beſt thanks of the community. An intimate

timate acquaintance with the interior circumſtances of the country, and a knowledge of agriculture, ſeem neceſſary to a complete inveſtigation of the queſtion under conſideration; and even with thoſe advantages, it will ſtill be attended with difficulty.

The Repreſentation of the Committee is a good hiſtorical eſſay on the corn laws, and contains many excellent maxims and opinions, which ſupport almoſt every thing I have preſumed to recommend to the attention of the publick, except that part which relates to warehouſing foreign corn, and to giving a diſpenſing power.

We are ſurpriſed that thoſe principles which naturally ariſe from ſuch maxims and opinions are not to be traced in the bill. We are induced to think thoſe principles really exiſt in the perſons who framed the bill, but that a fruitleſs diſpoſition to obviate

every intereſted murmur renders the whole ineffectual or pernicious.

The points to which I particularly wiſh to direct the attention of the publick are theſe :

1ſt. That we are gradually becoming, in a moſt alarming degree, dependant on foreign countries for ſubſiſtence, and that this country's independance, of all others in that reſpect, is of the utmoſt importance.

2dly. That England is capable of raiſing corn ſufficient for its own conſumption.

3dly. That the means of rendering it independant ſhould be by removing every diſcouragement, and holding out every encouragement to the growth of corn.

4thly. That the laws reſpecting corn, in conſequence of the change they have undergone,

dergone, are no longer encouragements, but great diſcouragements, to agriculture, particularly the ſyſtem of eſtabliſhing warehouſes of foreign corn, and that through the want of encouragement, the increaſe of corn in this kingdom, if any has taken place ſince the Corn Bill of 1773 paſſed into a law, has not kept pace with the demand.

5thly. That it is a fallacious idea that corn can poſſibly be grown in this country, under all the circumſtances of taxes, &c. &c. &c., at a lower price than it was in the laſt century.

6thly. That the attempt at reducing the price of corn below its proper level, conſidering the foregoing circumſtances, muſt eventually produce the very ſcarcity it is intended to prevent.

7thly. That this kingdom cannot carry

agriculture to its wiſhed-for extenſion, while an idea is cheriſhed of making the agriculture of the country ſubſervient to a trade in foreign corn.

I hope theſe points are made ſufficiently evident. There may be thoſe who will doubt, whether this country can raiſe ſufficient corn for its own ſupply; and it muſt be difficult to ſatisfy them by poſitive proofs. Let them conſider what has been done in Ireland, within a ſhort period, by a ſpirited encouragement of tillage. Before the year 1774 that kingdom regularly imported corn, and generally largely. The ſtate of the Iriſh trade in corn, ſince the operation of their preſent corn law commenced, ſhews the progreſs of their agriculture; and that Great Britain might have been wholly ſupplied by Ireland in the late year of ſcarcity, viz. 1789—a moſt extraordinary and encouraging change!

The

The production of corn is the firſt and moſt important occupation of the ſubjects of every country, and on its ſucceſs reſt the main ſupport and proſperity of every other trade. The intereſt of the grower is the intereſt of the conſumer, as in the end it produces a ſteady ſubſiſtence by promoting tillage; therefore, for the ſake of the conſumer, the moſt liberal encouragement and protection ſhould be given to the grower of corn.

Downing Street,
17th February, 1791.

POSTSCRIPT.

POSTSCRIPT.

AMERICA, that country on which, according to the opinion of the Committee of Council, all this quarter of the world is to depend for ſubſiſtence, never in one year ſent to Europe ſufficient for one day's ſupply—not even one meal for its inhabitants. I have taken an average of the export of wheat and flour from all North America, including the remaining Colonies, for three years, ending in 1771, chuſing a medium time between the two wars—I find the average export of wheat and flour to Europe, including the Mediterranean, was 175,502 quarters*; ſcarce

* The remainder of the wheat and flour exported from America went to the Britiſh and foreign Weſt Indies, where they muſt continue to go, unleſs they are ſupplied from Europe.

one

one week's ſupply even for Great Britain, according to the common rate of calculating a quarter of corn yearly for each inhabitant. What has been the export from that country ſince the laſt peace we cannot tell, but probably not more than it was before. The wheat countries of North America, on this ſide the Apalachean mountains, are not ſo extenſive as is generally imagined. The province of Quebec has ſometimes had a ſurplus of near 40,000 quarters, and, perhaps, next year did not produce near enough for its own conſumption. The crop in thoſe parts is very precarious. In the American States little wheat is raiſed north of New York, or ſouth of Virginia. The ſmall quantity raiſed in New England and the Carolinas is ſubject to a black ruſt, and is in general of a very indifferent quality, except a diſtrict of Connecticut, which lies between Connecticut river and the boundaries of New York. The country between the old provinces of New York and Pennſyl-

Pennſylvania, &c., and the lake Ontario, whenever completely ſettled, will be found beſt adapted to the growth of hemp; and that article will find a more ſteady and better market than wheat. The provinces of New York, the Jerſeys, Pennſylvania, and parts of Virginia and Maryland, are thoſe that produce any quantity of wheat. As their land loſes the advantage of being freſh, they are not likely to produce more than they did. Their crops in general are inferior, both in quality and quantity, to thoſe which are obtained from good land in Europe. They are liable to miſchiefs to which ours are not, particularly to be ruined by the weevil and by the Heſſian fly, even while growing. At the ſame time it has not proved a profitable article of traffick to the American merchant. More of them have been ruined in that line than in any other; very few, indeed, have proſpered by it. Europe has been, and will be, an uncertain market as long as her inhabitants are actu-

ated by common ſenſe. The diſtance of America is a diſadvantage. She cannot avail herſelf of a ſudden riſe of price in particular markets. What quantities of wheat may be raiſed hereafter on the other ſide of the Apalachean mountains, or the banks of the Ohio, I cannot ſay; but the tranſport of corn from the interior part of America, and along the incommodious navigation of the Miſſiſſippi, will be too expenſive to enable America to ſend from thence ſuch quantities of corn as may ruin the agriculture of Europe.

The chief ſettlements on the Ohio are at Fort Pitt, and one hundred miles down the river. That country might produce wheat, but it can have none but a home market. Small quantities may be carried acroſs the Apalachean mountains to Alexandria on the Potomach; but in general it will not bear the expence of land carriage. In reſpect to the conveyance by the Ohio and

and Miſſiſſippi, the diſtance from Fort Pitt to the junction of thoſe rivers is 1164, and from thence to New Orleans, where it ſhould be ſhipped, is about 1300 miles. The carriage down might be effected; but it is almoſt impracticable for the perſons employed to return againſt a ſtrong current of near 2500 miles.

THE END.